

Medicaid Expansion HB 590 PROPONENT Testimony

TO: Chairman Rep. David Howard, Vice-Chairs Representatives Cary Smith, Carolyn Pease-Lopez, members of House Human Services Committee

FROM: Mary Ann Dunwell, Helena resident, Montana citizen 461-5358

Good afternoon Mr. Chair, members of the committee and staff. I'm Mary Ann Dunwell, Helena resident, Montana citizen - and for full disclosure, a state employee here on my own time, not state time.

Thank you for the chance to speak in favor of expanding Medicaid. When I was pregnant with my son 18 years ago, my husband and I had lost our jobs. Our COBRA insurance - that was not cheap - was due to run out before my due date. I developed a serious medical condition called eclampsia. My son and I were rushed to intensive care and we almost died. Thank God we recovered, but we faced huge medical bills. If we had had the benefit of expanded Medicaid back then, we could have escaped financial hardship.

That was a while ago and not here in Montana. And although I marvel at how we Montanans help one another, no \$15 a plate spaghetti dinner, chili feed or quilt raffle approaches sustainable, affordable, accessible healthcare coverage.

Many Montanans are one situation away from losing everything. Mounting medical bills can throw anyone of us into bankruptcy. Expanding Medicaid would guard against that. It would help our neighbors who grow our food, work our Main Streets and raise our families. The 60 to 70,000 people additional Medicaid would help are not just numbers. They're somebody's loved one, somebody's neighbor, somebody's friend.

Some of you are now pointing to federal health exchanges as an alternative to expanding Medicaid. That's interesting, since last Session a good-sense attempt to create state health exchanges failed.

Some of you apparently want to wait and do an interim study. Wait for what? For someone to get an illness that could've been prevented with access to screening and prevention...wait for someone's sickness to get so bad it's beyond treatable...wait for people to die?

I gave a lot of thought to what I was going to say to you today, but despite the massive overwhelming outcry for Medicaid expansion, with all due respect, in my heart I'm so afraid you're going to vote this down. You're going to kill this great measure and good deal for Montana, even though you yourselves enjoy state government-provided health insurance. This is about life and death - and quality of life - but the majority will put your political agenda before the health and well-being of Montanans - the very people who voted you into office to do the right thing by them. In closing, I pray and beg that you prove me wrong. Thank you.